



NATIONAL CENTER ON

Parent, Family and Community Engagement

Supporting Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness for Early Childhood Professionals

This resource is part of a series designed for professionals in Head Start, Early Head Start and child care, including early childhood and school-age child care providers, Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agency (or designated entity) staff, and other key stakeholders.



Overview of Family Homelessness

Homelessness is a circumstance that families may experience when they are faced with such challenges as extreme poverty and lack of affordable housing. It can also occur when a family's current living situation becomes unsafe or unstable.

Homelessness is also a state of vulnerability for children and families. It exposes families to physical, mental, and developmental risks. Families experiencing homelessness often keep their situation and circumstances hidden from friends, professionals, and others because they feel ashamed or embarrassed.

For this reason, it is important for professionals to understand the definition of “homeless children and youth.” It is included in Section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act [42 U.S.C. § 11435a(2)], and is hereinafter referred to as the “McKinney-Vento Act’s definition.” Staff also must determine in a sensitive manner whether a family’s situation meets that definition. Early childhood and school-age child care professionals can provide needed support to children and families. They help reduce the impact of homelessness by building close, positive, and trusting relationships with families.

What We Know

Here is what we know about young children and families who experience homelessness:

- The number of young children experiencing homelessness has reached a historic high.¹ According to recent federal data, more than a million children under the age of 6 were identified as experiencing homelessness.²
- Children who are experiencing homelessness have more developmental, health, emotional, behavioral, and learning challenges than their peers.³
- Homelessness can create barriers to participating in early childhood and school-age child care programs. Such programs can help lessen the negative effects of homelessness on children and assist families to succeed.⁴ Moving frequently is an example of a barrier.

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Quality Programs Make a Difference

Quality early childhood and school-age child care programs offer children and their families services and opportunities to grow and thrive. These services are especially important for children and families experiencing homelessness.

Head Start, Early Head Start, early childhood and school-age child care programs that receive funding through Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidies are guided by federal regulations to identify and prioritize children and families experiencing homelessness. The goal of these federal regulations is to ensure that more children are enrolled in quality programs. This ensures that children and their families receive the services that support their success.

Language Matters

“Homeless” describes a situation; it does not define the people in that situation. We show families respect by speaking of “children and families experiencing homelessness” rather than “homeless children and families.” People-first language acknowledges the individual before the situation they may be experiencing.

However, you will note that the phrase “homeless children and youth” is used in the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of homeless.



Additional Resources

Child Care and Development Fund Reauthorization

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/ccdf-reauthorization>

Head Start Program Performance Standards

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii>

McKinney-Vento Definition of Homeless Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

<http://nche.ed.gov/legis/mv-def.php>

Notes

1. Ellen L. Bassuk, Carmela J. DeCandia, Corey Anne Beach, and Fred Berman. *America's Youngest Outcasts: A Report Card on Child Homelessness*. (Waltham, MA: The National Center on Family Homelessness at American Institutes for Research, 2014). Retrieved from <http://www.air.org/resource/americas-youngest-outcasts-report-card-child-homelessness>
2. Administration for Children and Families. *Early Childhood Homelessness in the United States: 50-State Profile*. (January 2016). Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/eecd/homelessness_profile_package_with_blanks_for_printing_508.pdf
3. Marci McCoy-Roth, Bonnie B. Mackintosh, and David Murphey. "When the Bough Breaks: The Effects of Homelessness on Young Children," *Child Trends: Early Childhood Highlights*, no.3 (February 2012). Retrieved from <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/2012-08EffectHomelessnessChildren.pdf>
4. National Center for Homeless Education & National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. *Early Care and Education for Children Experiencing Homelessness*. Fall 2013. Retrieved from <http://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/early-childhood.pdf>

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